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Ethiopia/Eritrea

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by Susanna Sprinkel, MAIC

History

Conflicts existed between Ethiopia and Eritrea from 1935 until 1993, when Eritrea became an independent nation. In 1997, a trade war developed between the two nations, causing further disputes. Hostilities ceased in 2000, and the governments are now working to institute a clear borderline between the two countries. Meanwhile, mine action programs are being established to clear the large number of AT mines, AP mines and UXO that remain scattered along the border and throughout Ethiopia and Eritrea as a result of these and other conflicts.



Landmine/UXO Overview

In Ethiopia, leftover landmines and pieces of UXO have affected approximately 700 million square meters of land. In Eritrea, there are an estimated 200,000 to 250,000 landmines and three million pieces of UXO throughout the country. The majority of these artifices reside in trenches along the border where a Temporary Security Zone (TSZ) has been established. The United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea Mine Action Coordination Center (UNMEE-MACC) is coordinating surveys to assess the full extent of the problem in both countries.

Casualties

An exact number of landmine/UXO-related casualties is unknown in both Ethiopia and Eritrea. The Eritrean government estimates at least 80,000 incidents have occurred since 1973. However, many casualties go unrecorded, and it is likely that the number of victims has increased significantly as refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) return to their native lands, especially in areas surrounding the TSZ.

Demining

Mine clearance in Ethiopia began in 1995 with the Ethiopian Demining Project, but efforts were halted during the trade war with Eritrea. Once hostilities ceased, the government established the Ethiopian Mine Action Office (EMAO) to coordinate mine action activities. Meanwhile, the Eritrean government has established the Eritrean Mine Action Programme (EMAP) to coordinate activities and the Eritrean Demining Agency

(EDA) to carry out those activities in the area. Both EMAP and EMAO are working closely with the UNMEE-MACC.

Reality Check

In an effort to further peace negotiations and restore economic conditions in Ethiopia and Eritrea, both governments have supplied minefield records to UNMEE. Aside from clearing land of the landmine/UXO threat, another key concern is reuniting children and families who were separated during the conflict. Many of these children are not receiving adequate health care and education in refugee camps, and they need to be reunited with their families as soon as possible.

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